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Bureau of Public Affairs • Department of State

African Refugees

August 1989

Background: In Africa today there are about 4 million true refugees. The term "refugee" is often applied loosely to people who are not actually refugees: economic migrants, migratory peoples who do not necessarily respect international borders, and persons displaced within their own countries by natural disasters and civil strife. In Africa, true refugees are defined as people who are outside their country of origin because of persecution (Geneva convention definition) or who have fled generalized conditions of violence (Organization of African Unity convention definition).

The refugee situation in Africa is complex. Many countries are concurrently generators of and receivers of refugees; refugees may be returning to some countries at the same time as their compatriots are fleeing into refuge. In 1988 the number of African refugees requiring assistance was about 1 million higher than in 1987, primarily because of civil warfare in southern Sudan, northern Somalia, and Mozambique and ethnic violence in Burundi.

In West Africa, more than 225,000 Senegalese and Mauritians have been displaced since April as a result of communal violence; more than 40,000 of these are Mauritians who sought refuge in Senegal.

Generally, African countries have demonstrated extraordinary hospitality to refugees, though the situation is becoming more strained as numbers grow.

The Horn of Africa and Sudan: Nearly half of Africa's refugees are in the Horn (Somalia, Ethiopia, and Djibouti) and Sudan. Beginning in June 1988, conflict in northern Somalia between the Somali Government and the Somali National Movement forced as many as 400,000 civilians to flee into Ethiopia and still others into Djibouti. Ethiopia, which has been one of the world's largest generators of refugees, also finds itself host to some 362,000 Sudanese refugees who have fled their country's devastating civil war. Refugee outflow in the Horn has been offset somewhat by the repatriation of Ethiopians from Djibouti and Somalia over the past few years. Since December 1986, 7,200 have been brought home from Somalia and 9,100 from Djibouti under the auspices of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Some 678,000 Ethiopians and 22,000 Chadians remain in Sudan.

Central Africa: Ethnic violence between Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi forced about 47,000 Hutus to flee into Rwanda in August 1988. Due in large part to the Burundi Government's serious attempts to effect national reconciliation, only about 1,000 refugees generated by the crisis remain in Rwanda. This swift, massive repatriation of refugees is unprecedented in modern African history. Nonetheless, some 250,000 Burundi refugees from previous crises remain in exile, as do more than 225,000 Rwandan refugees. Improved stability in Chad and Uganda has led to repatriation of the majority of their refugees from neighboring countries. More than 125,000 of the 185,000 refugees who fled Chad

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have returned. More than 350,000 Ugandan exiles have returned home steadily since 1983-84; 100,000 returned in 1988 alone. Repatriation of Ugandans from Sudan and Zaire is largely complete.

Southern Africa: Civil strife in Angola, Namibia, and Mozambique and violence resulting from South African apartheid have generated large numbers of refugees in southern Africa. Mozambique's civil war has intensified in the last few years, forcing more than 1 million citizens into neighboring countries and displacing some 2 million others. Malawi has taken up the burden of nearly 700,000 of these refugees and receives another 10,000-20,000 each month. Zambia and Zaire host more than 400,000 Angolan refugees, and Angola and Zambia may have hosted as many as 77,000 Namibians. In recent years, the number of South Africans recognized as refugees has stayed relatively constant at 21,000. Estimates of the South African exile populations go much higher.

The December 1988 southern Africa accords, mediated by the US among Angola, Cuba, and South Africa, have paved the way for the long-awaited independence of Namibia--an event that will dramatically change the refugee landscape of southern Africa. Since June 37,400 Namibian refugees have returned home under the auspices of a UNHCR repatriation program. Some 10,000 South African refugees now in Angola and an estimated 40,000 Angolan refugees in Namibia may seek refuge elsewhere.

UN role: The UNHCR has worldwide responsibility for protection of and assistance to refugees. In conflict settings, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also may play a role. In the longer term, the UN seeks durable solutions to some of the problems arising from the fact that many African refugees remain in their host countries for years with little hope of return. There still is a need to coordinate refugee assistance with development planning to increase refugees' self-sufficiency and reduce the burdens they impose on their host country. This theme was underscored at the 1988 Oslo Conference on Southern African Refugees, Returnees, and Displaced Persons.

US policy: In keeping with the view that refugees are an international responsibility, US policy promotes multilateralism and burdensharing. It is international practice and US policy first to promote safe, voluntary repatriation of refugees to their homelands. The next preferred alternative is settlement in countries of asylum within the region. If neither option works, consideration is given to resettlement in third countries, including the US.

US action: US policy translates into a continued US leadership role as the single largest financier of international assistance to African refugees. Though its share of total assistance dropped in fiscal year 1988 due to budget constraints, the US Government, through the Department of State's Bureau for Refugee Programs, provided for some 25% of UNHCR's Africa program and 20% of ICRC's efforts. Under the migration and refugee assistance appropriation and the President's emergency refugee and migration assistance fund, the US Government contributed \$60.5 million to UNHCR and \$19.5 million to ICRC for calendar year 1988 programs. The US Government also made available to refugees food commodities valued at some \$57 million and education scholarships for South Africans and Namibians amounting to \$1.3 million. In 1988, 1,588 African refugees were resettled in the US.